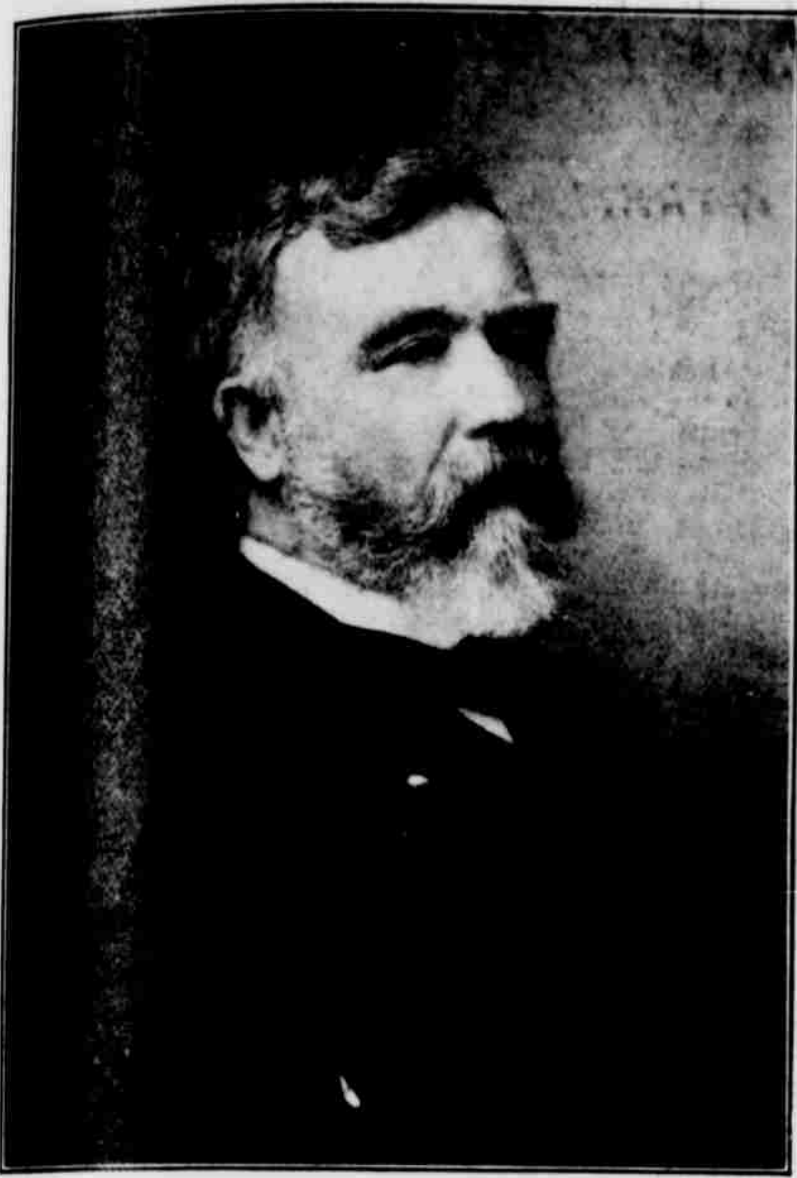


E. W. Thomson—A Canadian Master

By J. A. STEVENSON



E. W. THOMSON

Ottawa, Canada, February, 1920.

READERS of The Dearborn Independent must now be so familiar with the name of E. W. Thomson as the author of brilliant sketches of men and events in its pages, that some account of the career and accomplishments of the fine personality whom that name conceals may not be uninteresting to them. Edward William Thomson was born of mingled United Empire Loyalist and Scotch stock in Peel County near Toronto in February, 1849. He was named after his grandfather, Colonel E. W. Thomson, who served with great distinction in the stupid war of 1812 and played a notable part in the affairs of Upper Canada, as Ontario was then called. As a boy he received the best education then available, and from his early years he was a student and a lover of good literature and nature's beauties. He spent frequent holidays in the United States, and has a distinct memory of being spoken to when a boy of fourteen by Abraham Lincoln on the streets of Philadelphia. He was munching a cheesecake and paused in a bite to gaze at the gaunt figure of the President whom he recognized walking toward him. As he passed, Lincoln noted the frank, boyish stare and the cheesecake, looked down with a friendly smile and said, "Good, eh, sonny?" One year later, his innate love of liberty having triumphed over ancestral prejudices against the Republic, young Thomson enlisted in the famous 3rd Pennsylvania Veteran Cavalry and fought through the closing campaigns of the war. He saw the President once again when he reviewed the Army at City Point and has thus recorded his impressions in his fine poem, entitled "Father Abraham Lincoln":

"A thousand children thrilled as one
And not a man of all the throng knew why;
Some called his name, some blessed his holy heart,
And then inspired with pentecostal tongues,
We cheered so wildly for old Father Abe
That all the bearded generals flamed in joy.
What was the miracle? His miracle.
Was Father Abraham just a son of man,
As Jesus seemed to common Nazarenes?"

Since these far-off days Lincoln has ever been Mr. Thomson's favorite hero and his "When Lincoln Died" has been acclaimed as the best poetical tribute paid to the great President. Its closing lines run thus:

"Full thirty years to dust were turned
Before my pondering soul had learned
The blended vision there was sent
In sign that our Beloved meant;
Children who wrought so mild my will
Plough the long furrow kindly still
'Tis sweet the Father's work to see
Done for the memory of me."

Returning to Canada, when freedom's cause had triumphed, he became a surveyor and civil engineer and assisted in the construction of various important public works, living for a time in the new province of Manitoba. But literature and journalism had already claimed him for their own and in December, 1878, he resigned his position as a government engineer to become an editorial writer on the Toronto Globe, then at the height of its influence under the guidance of the celebrated George Brown. He accepted a smaller salary than he left because he was, as he says, innocent enough to think he could assist in defeating the campaign for Protectionism then afoot. Despite his efforts it prevailed at the polls and got a foothold to become, in Mr. Thomson's opinion, a perennial handicap to the natural industries of Canada and a curse to

her public life. In time he came to have full charge of the Globe's editorial columns but in 1890 he found himself at variance with the directors of the paper on a vital matter of policy and resigned instantly rather than sacrifice his right of independent judgment. He felt that Canadian interests were being betrayed by the secret negotiations which Sir Richard Cartwright had been carrying on with Mr. Blaine at Washington over reciprocity and which had unexpectedly become known to him.

Thereafter he resided in Boston for eleven years, engaged in literary work of various kinds, but his thoughts always wandered back to the land of his birth and in 1902 he settled in Ottawa, to dwell, like the Shunnamite woman of old, among his own people. He was at once offered a large salary to undertake the publicity work of the Conservative party but declined the offer and gave gratis powerful, independent support to Laurier with his pen in 1904. Again in 1911 he was with the Liberals on the reciprocity issue, but in 1917 he supported Sir Robert Borden on the ground that the Canadian electorate could not dismiss him from office without appearing to falter in the war. Few journalists in Canada have a better record of consistent independence and few have been able to exercise a greater influence upon the politics of their country. Mr. Thomson's chief medium of expression was his letters on Canadian affairs to the Boston Transcript which always catered specially to Canadian-born residents of New England, and there was not an editorial office in Canada which did not keep a careful watch over what appeared in the Transcript over the familiar signature. His steady independence made him available for quotation by both sides. One week a Liberal editor in a city finding E. W. T. assailing the Conservative policy would quote his words and call to witness the "well-known rugged honesty of the writer." Next week when E. W. T. had exposed some Liberal misdemeanor, the Liberal editor would find himself confronted with the damning words and his own certificate of the author's "rugged honesty." The slave and henchman of no man or party, he was the fearless and judicious critic of all parties and creeds and the friend of every good progressive cause. He has never wavered in his belief in free trade, and intervened with great effect in English politics at the time of the Protectionist revival of Mr. Chamberlain. On other matters he is an advanced Liberal; he has supported the single tax with his pen and enjoyed the friendship of Henry George. He dislikes centralized Imperialism in every shape and form, and believes in complete parliamentary independence for Canada with the British crown as the sole link. These and other views he has always expounded over his own signature and editors could take or leave his contributions as they chose. He has enjoyed the complete confidence both of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and of Sir Robert Borden, and such was his political standing and reputation abroad that when the Union of South Africa was incubating, it was to Mr. Thomson that its promoters turned for guidance concerning the experience of Canada in federation and the pitfalls to avoid, and the information and advice which he sent proved to be of material benefit in the settlement of the problem. He received the public thanks of the South African Convention at its close. In all her history Canada has never possessed an independent publicist of greater authority and influence.

It is not usually given to the sons of men to achieve distinction in more than one field of life, but apart from

his fame as a political journalist, Mr. Thomson has crowned his career with success in the realms of both poetry and fiction. He is today one of Canada's foremost living poets and his book of verse, "The Many Mansions House," deserves wider appreciation than it receives. It contains many poems of superlative merit (some of the best touch upon incidents of the Civil War) and Sir Arthur Quiller Couch ("Q"), the ablest critic in modern England, has included one of Mr. Thomson's poems in his "Anthology of Victorian Verse"—only two other Canadian poets enjoy this distinction. In fiction, Sir J. M. Barrie gives high praise to his "Old Man Savarin Stories" (Werner, Laurie & Company) and the London Evening Standard's literary critic recently declared them to be "perfect short stories written with thorough knowledge of the circumstances dealt with." They give a fine picture of different aspects of Canadian life. His literary work has won for him membership of the Royal Society of Literature in Britain and the Royal Society of Canada and his name figures on the select roll of the Author's Club of London.

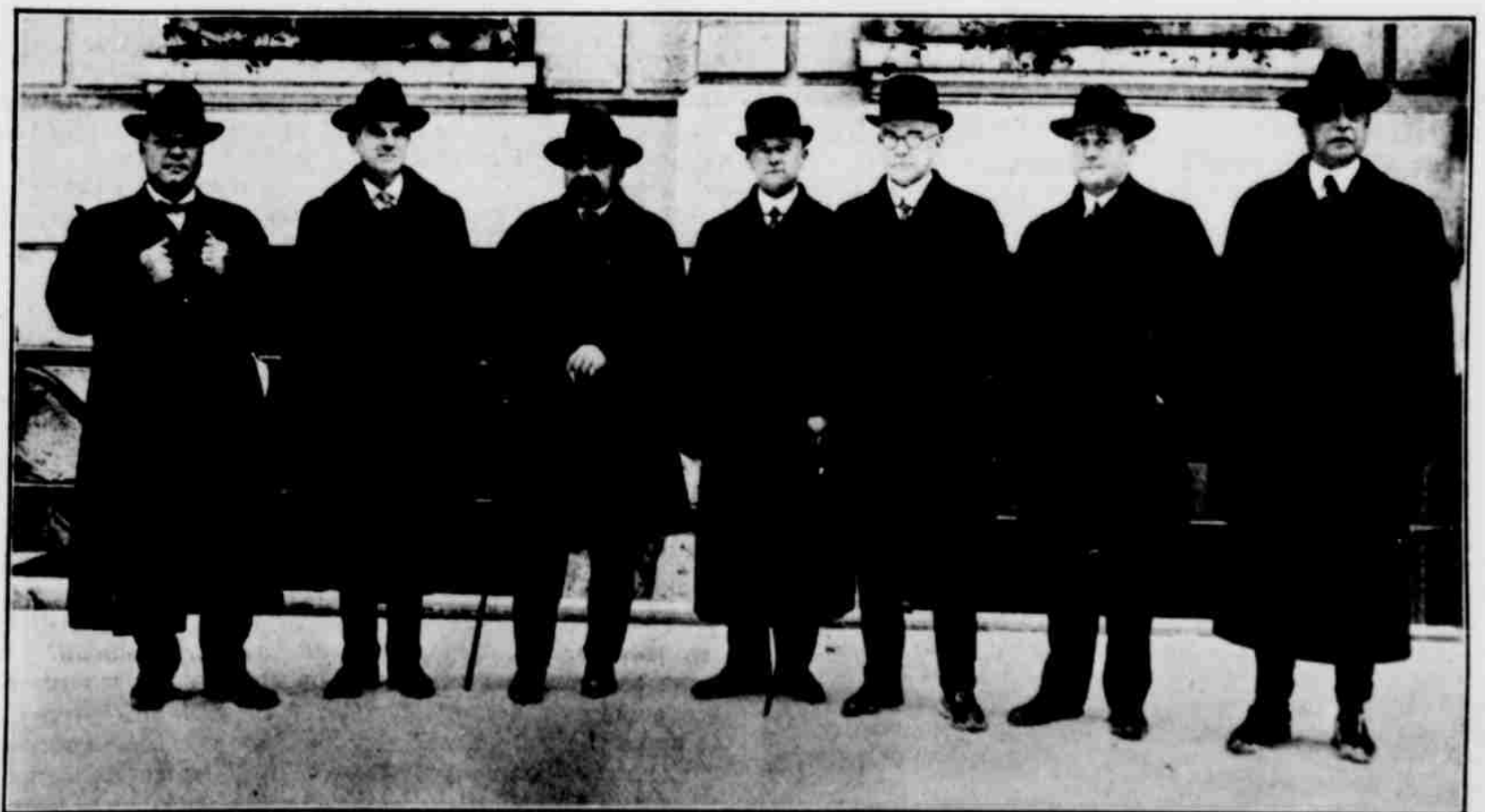
Mr. Thomson is now in the evening of his days but his mind has all its vigor unimpaired and his zest in life and his interest in public affairs are alike undimmed. He has outlived most of his generation but he has a unique gift of attracting the affections of youth and his stock of friendships has been perennially renewed. He numbers among his intimate friends most of the leading journalists and men of letters in Canada and rising politicians at Ottawa like Mr. T. A. Crerar are always glad to seek his counsel. Wherever the English language is spoken, he is known as a poet, a story teller, a man of letters and a publicist of international repute, and it has fallen to the lot of few men to make a greater individual contribution to the real civilization of the North American continent. He was lately the subject of a poem by Mr. W. E. Marshall, of Nova Scotia, himself a poet of some quality, which echoes the sentiments not only of Mr. Thomson's friends but of thousands who know only the fruits of his pen.

E. W. Thomson

Though I have never seen thee face to face
Nor heard thy voice nor grasped thy outstretched hand;
And may not ever, on this earthly strand
Enjoy thy presence as a day of grace
Yet thy unbounded heart enlargeth space
Within my heart..... Thy books are of the land
Of Truth and Beauty ever in demand
And I'm their usurer in my treasure-place;
Thy honored portrait shines above my hearth,
Delighting me with friendship at each gaze
And my life groweth rich in aftermath,
With all thy letters fragrant of sweet praise
And kind regard for me—one of a throng
Thy love hath lifted up and cheered along.

It is an appalling commentary upon the standards of Canadian public life that neither of the political parties have ever seen fit to offer this most distinguished Canadian, who possesses great political capacity and experience, a seat in the Senate at Ottawa which is filled by nomination. Mr. Thomson himself would scorn to seek any such dignity; he has found his reward in the pleasure of the artist, in work well done and widely praised. May he long be spared to wield his facile and brilliant pen in the cause of the international brotherhood which he has so finely championed for forty years in prose and verse.

What About Self-Determination for Hawaii?



(C) Harris & Ewing

HAWAII wants to be a state, wants to have more and more to do with self-government, and here is concrete evidence of the fact. These men represent Hawaii, and came all the way to Washington to ask for statehood. They wanted, also, congressional approval of their new constitution. They are:

Left to right, State Senators J. H. Wise and R. W. Shingle; J. K. Kalaniana'ole, Delegate to the U. S. Congress from Hawaii; Gov. C. J. McCarthy; Attorney-General, Harry Irwin, W. I. Rawlins and Henry J. Lyman.